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Quel(s) défi(s) pour les sciences sociales à l'heure de la mondialisation ?

Promoting a world of moral relatives. A challenge for the scientific community

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Beat SITTER-LIVER

PROMOTING A WORLD OF MORAL RELATIVES. A CHALLENGE FOR THE SCIENTIFIC[1] COMMUNITY

LIVING IN A WORLD OF «MORAL STRANGERS»

Over and over again, we are told and agree that, although there is no serious lack of moral conviction and orientation in our cultural communities, we are confronted with a plethora of competing moral positions and ethical endeavours. While in urgent need of commonly mastering vital problems in various fields of shared interest, we seem to be living together as « moral strangers »[2] with no chance of constructing a sufficiently detailed value system and ensuing normative rules, which would offer us a path to tackle those problems with the hope of lasting success.

The complaint about the absence – at least an overscarcity – of mutually affirmed and binding moral and legal rules[3] has been officialised: The European Council has been heading for a minimal set of common values and obligations in pressing problem areas such as biomedical research and practice[4]. While experiencing limited success, the Council had to pay the price of remaining rather general and evading queries where consensus could not be reached. The European Union issued directives, e.g. on patenting living substances[5], which remained contested, lead one of its member states to launch a law suit (eventually lost in court), and are still far from being generally transposed into national legislation[6].

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[1] The term « scientific » is used here in a broad sense, including natural and social sciences, medical scientists, engineers and scholars (the community of the humanities).

[2] H.T. Engelhardt, *Bioethics and Secular Humanism. The Search for a Common Morality*. London and Philadelphia 1991, XI, XIV. Cf. the whole Introduction for a quick and comprehensive orientation.

[3] For a telling, though biased example see George Weigel's critique of secular Europe renouncing the very heart of its cultural tradition supporting human dignity, human rights, the spiritual humanism, and democracy: the Judeo-Christian heritage (G. Weigel, «The Spiritual Malaise that Haunts Europe», *Los Angeles Time*, May 1, 2005.

[4] Council of Europe, *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with Regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine. Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine*. Oviedo, 4.4.1997 (European Treaty Series 164). The work of the Convention is work in progress. A recent achievement in this continuous effort is the *Additional Protocol to the Convention of Human Rights and Medicine Concerning Biomedical Research*, Strasbourg, 25.1.2005.

[5] European Commission, Directive 98/44/EG, Brussels, 1998.

[6] We must not, however, overlook the efforts the European Union has been making, particularly in the last few years, to establish generally recognised values and norms. Its most fundamental

What has been experienced on the European level is but an echo of the everyday struggle for ethical and political understanding and co-operation in the particular European countries – i.e. nations and cultural areas featuring international as well as intranational differencies which seem to make the mere quest for a European and universally shared moral and legal area a utopia. In any case, it has become doubtful whether the traditional democratic procedures still offer an effective path out of this akward situation[7].

Many of the normative controversies characteristic of the present historical situation are due to scientific achievements and discoveries, and to technological advances. They have been changing what we consider reality, and traditional images of the world and the human being have been altered[8]. Out of the new forms of understanding ourselves and the world we live in, emerged unexpected possibilities, interests, and objectives of forging both of them. However, these interests and objectives are far from being unanimously welcomed. There exists an obvious clash between traditional and newly acquired concepts and attitudes, to such an extent that peaceful co-existence within and between our societies has been put under heavy additional stress. Thus, looking for common ethical procedures, moral attitudes and standards has become a major concern of the socially, politically, culturally and, to some extent, also economically competent and responsible actors: institutions as well as individuals, amongst them the overarching organizations alluded to, viz. the European Community and the Council of Europe. Global bodies are engaged, too, in the first place the United Nations Organization with its precarious efforts of having the human rights respected all over the world. Think of the actual controversy about institutionalising a new Human Rights Council with the USA's rather arrogant efforts to shape this important international initiative according to their convenience, if not to simply send it to the bottom.

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initiative is the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and its introduction into the draft European Constitution – even if this draft was finally rejected by two of the member states, and therefore is not valid today. Since more than twelve years, a European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies has been issuing *Opinions* to the European Commission, e.g. on *Ethical Aspects of Clinical Research in Developing Countries* (n° 17, February 4, 2003). In 2001, the Commission established a *Science and Society Action Plan* which also included a strong ethics component in putting responsible science at the heart of policy making. This plan is now part of the still running 6th Framework Programme (FP6) of the EU project of creating a European Research Area (part of a Communication by Rainer Gerold, in a paper he gave at the Amsterdam Conference on « Common Values in the European Research Area », organized by ALLEA, the European Federation of National Academies of Sciences and Humanities (May 20/21, 2005).

[7] Cf. R. Dahrendorf, *Die Krisen der Demokratie. Ein Gespräch*, Munich, C. H. Beck, 2002, 101 f., 103 f.

[8] A prominent example has been provided by the efforts and the achievements of the neurosciences leading, amongst others, to the contention that human free will were but an illusion. Cf. G. Roth, *Fühlen, Denken, Handeln. Wie das Gehirn unser Verhalten steuert*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2001, p. 453. W. Singer, *Ein neues Menschenbild? Gespräche über Hirnforschung*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2003, p. 24-34, particularly p. 32 f.

THE QUEST FOR ETHICAL CONSENSUS AND COMPROMISE

Science, technology, and scholarship with their personal and institutional actors are among the leading factors responsible of the « postmodern predicament »; and since their performances and products are no longer a priori and generally saluted as a wished for progress, and promise of general wealth and happiness[9], they are also among the first to be hit by the demand of engaging in the quest for existential meaning and moral orientation. Their representatives, in the first row their academies and professional associations, perceived and after some time accepted that demand, turning it into one of their prominent responsibilities.

They have been realising their responsibility in various ways, particularly on two separate though indissolubly related tracks. The first consists in submitting scientific and scholarly practice to ethical critique and moral regulation[10]; the second in elaborating the specific responsibilities of those pertaining to the scientific and scholarly communities in looking for ethically acceptable ways of meeting the challenges of present day societies, of humanity at large[11]. On both tracks, though in different ways, they have been striving after universal normative arrangements. A third track they followed should not been overlooked, i.e. the direct political engagement when faced with stirring violation of the principle of human dignity, more precisely of human rights[12], particularly the right to free scientific and scholarly activity and communication. Lately a forth track has become dominant, with the public discussion – and sometimes heavy protest –

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[9] G. Ropohl, *Ethik und Technikbewerbung*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1996, chapter 1.

[10] E.g. *European Science and Scientists Between Freedom and Responsibility. A Conference organized by ALLEA, the European Federation of National Academies of Sciences and Humanities*, ed. by P. D. J. Drenth, J. F. Fenstad, and J. D. Schiereck, Luxembourg, European Communities, 1999. Cf. also the annexes in *Technik und Ethik*, ed. by H. Lenk and G. Ropohl, Stuttgart, 1987, p. 311-363; *Medizinische Ethik im Alltag*, ed. by A. Bondolfi and Hj. Müller, Basel/Bern, EMH Schweizerischer Ärzteverlag, 1999, p. 435-587; W. Shea and B. Sitter(-Liver), *Scientists and Their Responsibility*, Canton MA, Watson Publishing International, 1989; G. Berthoud and B. Sitter-Liver, *The Responsible Scholar. Ethical Considerations in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Canton MA, Watson Publishing International, 1996 (The last two publications were issued on behalf of the Conference [today the Council] of the Swiss Scientific Academies).

[11] In 2003, ALLEA published a *Memorandum on Scientific Integrity. On standards for scientific research and a National Committee for Scientific Integrity (NCSI)*. Cf. also the Bibliography, p. 21 f. In 2002, the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences had already decided on and published a respective set of guidelines and norms, cf. *Integrität in der Wissenschaft. Richtlinien der SAMW für wissenschaftliche Integrität in der medizinischen und biomedizinischen Forschung und für das Verfahren bei Fällen von Unlauterkeit,* Basel, 2002. Cf. again the Bibliography on p. 19 f. The Council of the Swiss Scientific Academies (CASS) had also been active on the international level, see e.g. « Sustainable Development Futures: A selection of Swiss Academic Perspectives», ed. by B. Sitter-Liver et al., in *Our Fragile World: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development. A Forerunner to the Encyclopedia of Life Supporting Systems*, Oxford UK, EOLSS Publishers, 2001, p. 2153-2173. A separate edition was published by CASS under the title *Supporting Life on Earth*, ed. by B. Sitter-Liver, G. Bächler, A. Berlinger-Staub, Bern, 2001. Note that these are but a few examples out of an impressive series of codes, analyses, and declarations issued on different organizational levels and throughout the world.

[12] E.g. the Human Rights Network.

in view of morally and ethically controversial scientific and technological advances[13]; it is taking the role of ethical consultants to authorities of different kinds as well as to firms, often by insisting on the prevalence of scientific truth and by claiming particular ethical competence in the public debate, though not rarely on rather swampy grounds.

STRENGTHS, OMISSIONS, AND FAILURES

The national academies and particularly their international umbrella organizations had and still have a prominent role to play in this endeavour of creating universal ethical understanding and moral practice. Not directly depending on economic interests or political ambition, they stand the test as stronghold of independence, at least in the double sense of reflecting possible vested interests and dependencies, and of allowing critique and neutralization of such dependencies within their domain. By their very terms of reference, they ought to be and as a rule are motivated to open the field for controversial discourse, aiming at clear, enlightened, and reflected advice to third parties, the general public, and more particularly to social, economic, and political decision-makers. In this they have been providing unique achievements allowing the solution of urgent problems in the general and thus truly public interest. And yet, there remain at least two domains in which the scientific and scholarly communities are still far behind of what would have been one of their intrinsic obligations.

Decades ago, Charles Percy Snow deplored the grave gap between what he termed the literary intellectuals and the scientists – the representatives of the humanities, the empirical social and the natural sciences, as we might put it today, still in a rather reductionist way[14]. That gap has not yet been filled, notwithstanding the notorious demand of inter- and transdisciplinary co-operation. Quite to the contrary, we experience the imperialism of the language of science[15], particularly of the so-called life sciences. And the gap was even carelessly jumped over by the contention that the new and truly third culture would be formed by scientists with philosophical competence, leaving aside the knowledge and wisdom gathered by the traditional humanities[16].

An important part of the difficulties we face when engaging in the quest of ethical understanding seems to stem from cultural differencies inherent in the overall scientific system and causing deafness where open ears, intellectual alert-

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[13] Take human therapeutic and reproductive cloning or research on human stem cells as just two examples.

[14] C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and a Second Look*, London/New York, Cambridge University Press, 1969.

[15] J. Anderegg's expression. Cf. also his study «Zur Legitimation und zur Wissenschaftlichkeit der Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaften», in *Kulturwissenschaften und Perspektiven*, ed. by J. Anderegg and E. A. Kunz, Bielefeld, 1999, p. 83-92.

[16] J. Brockmann, *Die dritte Kultur. Das Weltbild der Naturwissenschaft,* München, W. Goldmann, 1996; cf. the Introduction, p. 15-35 (The English original *The Third Culture* was published a year before (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1955.)

ness, and curious hearts were needed. The academies of arts and sciences have still a long way to go in their firm, it is true, attempt to better that harmful situation[17].

This failure is at the roots of another and commonly known difficulty with which science in particular is confronted, i.e. the replacement of the exuberant belief in the goodness of scientific progress by scepticism and even contempt for scientific and scholarly achievement (though usually accompanied by mostly unconscious or at least unreflected use of and everyday pleasure in countless such achievements). The phenomenon is notorious under the heading of fading acceptance of science in society. It is less familiar as the lack of acceptance of societal needs and positions by science. Both science and society (a separation which is itself purporting a gap that is not acceptable in the light of systems theory, nor in sociological and economic, not even in epistemological critique) stand up against each other with expectancies and demands as if they were autonomous entities with legitimate claims, instead of acknowledging their mutual pervasion and entwinement. Too many scientists still think that the general public needs one-way enlightenment about what they do, and that then the problem of trust would be dissolved. True communication would mean, however, accepting mutual critique and advice, and honouring different and maybe not easily reconcilable interests. Here, too, the academies and analogous scientific and scholarly bodies are confronted with an important task that needs modesty as well as competence. Striving after an understanding in fundamental moral and ethical queries either produced by science and scholarship, or being their research object, would certainly form an essential element in building a common vessel of truth, trust, and peace for a successful trip on uncertain waters.

Main concerns of today's societies, nay humanity, should stand in the foreground of such endeavours. They are commonly well known, and should encompass global challenges, such as the fight against poverty and hunger, and the ensuing need to reexamine and eventually modify the rule of actual economic systems with their theories; ecological deterioration of the globe; decent water, housing, and energy supply for everybody, but particularly for the less privileged; control of overall population growth. They ought to include problems created by biomedical development such as human cloning and genetical engineering of living substances, with their ensuing economically driven patenting issues. These are but a few examples of the many globally relevant concerns waiting for thorough co-operative investigation by scientists and scholars and the innumerable professional institutions. And they are of high social, cultural, and political relevance, on national, regional, and global levels.

Needless to stress that generally stopping science and scholarship would not result in any favourable and fruitful solution. Yet both science and scholarship do need guidance springing from two equally important sources: firstly emerging from within the scientific and scholarly cultural project of humanity, and secondly stemming from outside, offered by societal and imposed by political entities situated at various levels. However, the prerequisite of any successful guidance are values shared by the scientific and scholarly community and, in the end, by the universal community of – if not moral friends, then at least – moral relatives. This may sound

[17] Cf. J. P. Snow (note 14).

quite utopian to many ears, particularly of those of the all too prudent and clever pragmatists. Yet it outlines an ideal that we must not dismiss if we sincerely care about true mutual understanding and generally life supporting peace and solidarity.

DIFFICULTIES TO OVERCOME

The quest for shared values – entailing universally accepted norms – has to count with a number of serious difficulties. They must be explicitly faced and handled so as to save the quest from ending in a vague and « abstract utopia »[18]. I shall briefly address three of these difficulties.

The first difficulty is of a theoretical nature. It dwells in the controversy about universally acceptable normative arrangements ; in the doubt whether these are at all possible and, if so, desirable. The postmodern interpretation of our world has become notorious : We are living in culturally surroundings where there are no more any generally binding moral instances[19]. The search for meaning and orientation has become individualised ; the ethical teaching that, in principle, every interest must be taken seriously on its own ground, is now a truism ; the quest for at least a « minimum concept of natural law »[20] has seen itself being reduced to the very general, thus abstract demand never to use a fellow human as a mere means[21]; to the contention that the accepted minimal significance of the concept of human dignity is given by the person's right not to be degraded and humiliated[22], and to accept that the idea of symmetry precedes that of asymmetry[23]. In political discourses as well as in the notorious self-assertion accompanying almost naturally activities of intercultural encounter, the possibility and the acceptability of a universally adequate and obliging interpretation of the notion of human dignity has been theoretically questioned, while its non-universalizability has been dramatically affirmed on practical grounds. Insisting on the indisputable validity of intracultural, particularly intrareligious rules, provides just one of the most telling examples[24].

The second difficulty deepens the first one. It concerns by far not only, yet particularly scientific and scholarly associations proud to stress their independence

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[18] E. Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie I*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1965, p. 124-132.

[19] Cf., for many, Dahrendorf 2002 (note 7), p. 104. It is a scandal, Svend Andersen, president of Societas Ethica said in August 2002, that the plurality of options in ethics has been accepted.

[20] H. L. A. Hart, *The Conception of Law*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1961, p. 189-195.

[21] E.g. H. T. Engelhardt (note 2) ; E. Tugendhat, « Gibt es eine moderne Moral ?», *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, Nr 50, 1986, p. 323-338, both echoing I. Kant.

[22] P. Balzer, K.-P. Rippe, and P. Schaber, *Menschenwürde vs. Würde der Kreatur*, Freiburg/ München, Karl Alber, 1998, p. 28-31.

[23] E. Tugendhadt (note 19), p. 334-336.

[24] Today's newspapers and magazines are full of striking examples ; I do not think I need to cite any of them. However, I cannot help but highlight firstly again the USA in their pragmatic contradiction when claiming to be the worldwide guarantor of the human rights, while at the same time, with reference to so-called national interests, trampling those very rights underfoot ; secondly the daily lunacy of asking to kill and of killing hundreds and thousands of not involved and innocent human beings under the pretence of securing a particular human right or a indefinite number of those rights.

as political consultants. Science and technology are not a world of their own but part of what has been named the socio-economic-technological system[25]. Scientific and technological research and development are to a high degree controlled by private enterprises and therefore driven by economic interests and boundary conditions.

Public statistics tell us that an important part and in some countries, like Switzerland, more than half of the funds invested in pure and applied research is spent by the private sector. It is not an irrational guess to hold that freedom of research, one of the highly praised human or fundamental rights is generally (sic) very limited under such conditions. The same applies to publicly funded research since such research has to support the country's competitive position, and the apparently obvious needs of the political community. Freedom of research is one of the major arguments put forward by politicians and scientists when programmes and projects are confronted with public controversies. Yet it seems that such defense is usually highly interest driven, and it calls another suspicion: that it serves to make one overlook, dismiss, or forget to what important extent research activities are in fact commissioned work, determined and thus limited by mostly economic, but also societal, political, and even military preferences[26].

When I maintained that this was also true for publicly promoted research and development, then I did so considering that their determining policy is usually fashioned by respective private lobbying. It is neither a secret nor astonishing that societal expectations together with personal ambitions influence even the so-called fundamental or non-oriented research. Being part of that complex system with its manifold interrelations and network processes, the scientific and also the scholarly associations are far from being independent of the social, political, and economic struggles. If they issue ethical guidelines and codes of ethical conduct for their professional communities – a pedagogical and ordering function of high significance – their statements cannot be considered as if they were universally acceptable by nature. The fact that infringements may be politically and economically successful and then become firstly excused, later legitimate, is a proof: Representatives of the Swiss National Science Foundation arguing successfully that the rhythm of research advances is superior to the one of political decisions, provides an actual example[27]. In June 2005, this argument was echoed by the majority of the Swiss National Parliament voting the legal status of pre-implantation diagnosis, in contradiction to its former legal dispositions[28]. In January 2003, Christopher Reeves had provided another telling example. He related trials on human paraplegic subjects by use of the so-called therapeutic cloning. Asked to provide more details he refused to do so on the ground that scientific progress needed peer-review and other internal measures before it could and should be made public[29].

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[25] G. Ropohl, *Technologische Aufklärung*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1991, chapters 1 and 5, part., p. 118.

[26] « Sometimes, the scientific community is behaving like a cartel. Only more dangerously.», R. Dahrendorf (note 7), p. 107 (author's translation).

[27] The Foundation did so in defense of its decision to finance a research project using imported human embryonic stem cells while production of those cells in the country is forbidden on constitutional and legal grounds.

[28] Cf. « Forschung ist Politik weit voraus », *Der Bund*, 16 Juni, 2005, p. 11.

[29] Sidney, Reuters 24.1.2003, cf. *Science et Cité Newsletter*, Bern, 4.2.2003.

Yes, there are examples demonstrating the opposite : the public unmasking of major infringements of rules and good scientific practice, and the heavy consequences of those guilty of such moral crimes. The sudden fall of the South Korean « national hero » Hwang Woo Suk, a cloning expert, is probably the most recent prominent example[30]. But such internationally disseminated cases are rare ; probably, they are covering a reality which the respective community prefers to veil. Setting personal experiences aside, the many well documented and commented cases of blunt fraud and crime within that community and its military and political environment provides an acceptable ground for such a suspicion[31].

The normative statements of academies and professional associations are themselves often enough fruits of material and rhetorical compromise. They ought to be critically analysed and interpreted, i.e. submitted to an open discourse reaching beyond their confines, and indispensable for assessing and assuring their potential universality. In short, ethical statements of scientists, scholars, and their institutions are far from being truly authoritative ; they are but one voice, though a highly meaningful one in the general strive for normative orientation within society.

The third difficulty flows from the second. As elements of the socio-economico-technological system, scientists and scholars depend on its processes and interrelations. Being functional, they can be used. And since power relations are inherent to the system, they may be abused. Where abuse meets their proper interests, corruption may ensue. This is not a secret either. Ralf Dahrendorf gave an apt description of what is at stake, in one of his recent interviews, resuming what many authors had already displayed : Scientists must not be left alone. Their ways of pursuing their proper interests and of defending their convictions are often dogmatic and sometimes misleading. Since in all important ethical questions an economic interest may – and frequently does – come into play, « there will always be a scientists who can be bought »[32]. Of course, this does not mean that buying always plays a role where scientific and scholarly controversies appear. Striving after truth necessarily implies critique and controversy. However, while dissents and public controversy among scientists and scholars are set, processes of ruling them out by powerful, sometimes institutionalised mainstream positions are also evident. Sociologically speaking, this is again neither extraordinary nor astonishing. But it encumbers ethical contributions and positions as well as formal statements of individual scientists or their corporations with a mortgage.

SCIENTIFIC AND SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENTS, IMPACT, AND OBLIGATIONS

In spite of those difficulties and often aware of them, scientists, scholars, and their institutions were successful in coming to terms with moral and ethical challenges.

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[30] Cf. « Klon-Forscher Hwang als Fälscher entlarvt », *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* Nr 301, 24/25 Dezember 2005, p. 19.

[31] Cf. e.g. S. Loue, *Textbook of Research Ethics. Theory and Practice*, New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999, chapter 1.

[32] R. Dahrendorf, 2002 (note 7), p. 107.

Experiencing moral and in general cultural development, very often induced by the growth of scientific knowledge and technological competence, they considered their normative activity as work in progress and in consequence reviewed and modified their former findings and statements when need was at hand. The work on international ethical guidelines for biomedical research involving human subjects provides a telling example. Starting with the « Doctors' Trial » at Nuremberg in 1947, an intensive process of reflection, formalised decision-making, and reviewing lead to the joint CIOMS'[33] and WHO's 2000 edition of the respective guidelines[34]. They are exemplary in that they not only give voice to scientific expertise and interest, but explicitly integrate universal political and thus societal reflection and development. They ground their essential concepts on human concern of true universality and in consequence provide a solid platform for tackling controversial concretization and application. This prominent example is by no means unique. Together with comparable guidelines issued by national and international professional bodies, it proves that the hope of overcoming difficulties and achieving viable universal norms through the endeavour of scientists and scholars is a reasonable one.

The Opinion of the European Group on Ethics and New Technologies (EGE), issued on 4 February, 2003, has been providing a respective testimony giving rise to legitimate hope. The Opinion deploys « Ethical Aspects of Clinical Research in Developing Countries ». Not only does EGE ground its considerations on the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (28.9.2000), particularly « on the indivisible and universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity », but it also enumerates the fundamental principles it has been recognizing since its beginning, maintaining that they are universally accepted. Among them, we come across the principle of respect for human dignity and the principles of non-exploitation, non-discrimination, and non-instrumentalization; the principle of individual autonomy; the principle of justice and the principle of beneficence and non-maleficence; the principle of proportionality, « including that research methods are necessary to the aims pursued and that no alternative more acceptable methods are available », and others[35] The quest for generally acceptable ethical principles is not only without any hope, but has been successful. Even if we should maintain that this is true only on the general level, we have to admit that unanimity regarding principles remains a necessary condition for any more concrete ethical, moral, and as a result political understanding.

At this point, we must turn again to the undeniable fact that scientific, scholarly, and technological achievements are fashioning – to a decisive degree – our images of ourselves and of the world we are living in. An actual example has been provided by the recent findings within neurobiology and brain research, relevant to and highly questioning traditional concepts of freedom of will, autonomy, and responsibility – and therefore touching our expectations with relation to ethics and moral education[36].

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[33] Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) and World Health Organization (WHO).

[34] CIOMS, Geneva, 2002.

[35] Cf. paragraphe 2.2, « General Approach », of the above cited Opinion.

[36] Cf. G. Roth and W. Singer (note 8).

The forming power to determine other essentials of human existence – the term of essentials being understood in a broad sense, including the natural conditions not just of human life, but of life in general – entails, at least for reasonable, i.e. morally open beings the obligation to participate in the endeavour of moral orientation and ethical critique. The public investment in the education and in the activities of individual scientists, scholars, and engineers as well as their frequently privileged social position, transform it into an irredeemable moral duty, resulting in the obligation to at least some form of political engagement.

CONCLUSION

Though the outline on which I have ventured is not more than a sketch, it makes it clear that working for a world of moral relatives is not without any dangers and even pitfalls. This applies not least to those adhering to the scientific and scholarly community. But it has also been shown that sincere efforts are being made by that community to meet the challenge, and that those efforts can be successful. For all those assuming the moral point of view (and whoever is asking moral respect from others has done so and is bound by the ethico-logical interdiction to succumb to the pragmatic contradiction), such a situation turns into a moral obligation – into the moral duty not to break with their engagement to commonly search for and eventually establish principles and norms destined to be shared by whoever is of good will and reasonable.

Yet the sketch also displayed that we cannot satisfy ourselves with remaining just moral *relatives*. The challenges of today's socio-economic, technologically and scientifically driven civilization are forcing us into more, if we truly wish to control the cultural conditions we have been creating. There are at least some fundamental values and principles we need to share, and be it only out of a vital interest to create and assure for each of us a solid basis for difference, dissent, and controversies[37].

Meeting that challenge, the scientific and scholarly community contributes to moral understanding within society at large, hopefully also on a global level. This hope is not a void utopia but, in the sense of Ernst Bloch, a concrete one[38] and therefore, again, an ideally driven duty we ought not to dismiss as long as we stick to the overarching ideal of being a moral, i.e. a universally oriented subject striving after what is good in itself. This, then, would result in sincerely honouring and truly preserving human dignity.

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[37] Cf. B. Sitter-Liver, « Skepsis als Praxis. Zur Grundlegung der praktischen Philosophie », *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, Nr 48, 1994, p. 372-396.

[38] E. Bloch (note 17), p. 124-132.